

Peeden (J. T.)
President's Address;

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

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JEFFERSON COUNTY

MEDICAL SOCIETY,

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING,

January 3d, 1871.

BY

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THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN:—

We are met to conclude the business and appointments of the past year and enter upon the duties and responsibilities of the new.

Our association, from its organization to the present time has steadily progressed in interest, character and usefulness. Our numbers at first few, and from diverging localities, have acquired strength both numerically and professionally, and our meetings have but tended to strengthen our social interests, as well as to elevate the standard of professional qualification among its members.

The new year ushers in abundant facilities for increased improvement as the advantages presented to the practitioner and student, are far superior to those possessed a few years ago. To the observing physician new fields are opening on every hand for research and scientific investigations. And when we contrast the soundness of the practice of one half century ago, with that of the present day, who will dare to say, that our profession has not kept ample pace with kindred professions and in point of skill and research far outstripped them. The gradual advancement of our profession in intellectual culture becomes an object of profound interest to every mind capable of appreciating the influence of knowledge upon the happiness and destiny of mankind. Every new agency by which the boundaries of science are enlarged, and the light of philosophy more widely diffused, is now welcomed as a tribute to civilization, and the revelation of a latent power to give fresh conquests from the domain of truth. Our medical brethren ever true to their calling have been distinguished for their enlightened efforts to elevate the moral condition of the public, as well as to relieve the suffering incident to our humane nature.

We point with pride to the discoveries by which hitherto, almost insurmountable difficulties have been overcome and the sources of humane happiness expanded and we honor the memory of those enlight-

ened worthies, by whose wisdom, skill and energy these grand results have been accomplished. Yet we have not been indifferent to the moral and intellectual elements, whose harmonious development constitutes the true glory of our calling and entitles it to a rank among the refined and liberal professions. By judicious and liberal legislations we have perfected a course of medical training, which brings the means of professional advantage within the reach of all who are thoroughly imbued with a love for its mysteries, and a sincere desire of relieving human suffering and distress. But legislation alone is not sufficient to impart vitality and vigor to any profession, however perfect the skill displayed in its structure and theory. Happily for us, these important requisites have not been withheld. Generous and enlightened men have stepped forward with an arder which cannot be too gratefully acknowledged, to secure the efforts of our professional brothers, and to give effect to their aspirations for higher intellectual development. Is it fortunate for the welfare of this association, and honorable to its fame, that we have in this city a body of cultivated and munificent professional gentlemen of whom any city might be proud, who are zealously devoted to the advancement of medical science, and active in elevating the standard of professional usefulness. To their public spirit, and well directed exertions, this society owes much of its influence and character. To them we are indebted for the first foundation of an institution designed to embrace within its ample sphere of operations the entire circle of medical investigations and to elevate the standard of medical attainments to that of kindred associations throughout the State. Nor have our adjacent towns and villages been indifferent spectators in the matter. Professional brethren of sterling worth, whose acquisitions enable them to assume a higher rank among the magnates of our calling, have rallied their energies in behalf of this association and nobly seconded the

labors of its founders. And such we welcome with our most cordial greeting and we look forward with pleasant anticipation to the moment, when our society shall be second to none other, whether in numbers, standing, character or usefulness. From the progress already made in the design, we may safely and confidently anticipate an abundant success, that shall attend our labors and impart new lustre to our undertaking. And thus it becomes our duty, each to engage in the noble effort, worthy of every generous mind, unitedly to move forward, in promoting the welfare and increasing the happiness of our fellow men. When we take a retrospective view of the time, when men of acknowledged ability, character and eminence met together in this city to transact business, pertaining to the old medical associations of this county, we are forcibly reminded of their wise counsels, their sterling worth, their bright examples of manly fortitude and honor in the discharge of their arduous professional duties. And never can the names of Spencer, Trowbridge, Crowe and White and a host of other worthies be consigned to forgetfulness whilst the fruits of their labors remains and their works, "they do follow them." Their memory shall be ever green and shall revive in our breast, those deep undying emotions of respect and devotion which time shall never extinguish. Their career presented a beautiful illustration of devotion to their profession and of the elevating tendency of that calling, when supported by integrity and high moral susceptibilities. In a community, so appreciative of merit, it was impossible for such men to remain in tranquil retirement. Eminent, as were they, for success and skill, they never failed to discharge their trust, with capacity and fidelity.

We are now called upon to assume the places they honored by their lives. One by one they have gone before, and to us is reserved, the pious office of venerating their memories and remembering their sterling worth.

Although yet in its infancy, our society has assumed proportions, to which at first we hardly dared look forward, and although many eminent physicians, residents of this county have not as yet, honored us by their presence and counsels, it

is to be hoped that all animosities, "if any such unhappily exist," will speedily be overcome, and that strengthened by their union with us, we shall heartily and steadily labor together, to advance the interests of the association.

No hour, gentlemen, in the history of American medicine, has presented such auspicious omens, as are now brought before the truly honest, sincere and capable practitioner. The professions is numerically and characteristically strong. Although by legal enactment, we mourn the loss of many civil privileges, and by the adverse surroundings, incident to professional progress in a new and shifting country, that "*esprit au corps*" which has never left us, has secured a glorious fruitage of added learning and increased means of usefulness. The standard practitioner of half a century ago, was hardly a match for the graduating tyro of the present day. Our profession is rich and ample in experimental knowledge and has made a philosophical certainty of many vital facts, which were hitherto but uncertain or unproved theories. No institution on earth presents such a Catholic uniformity of sentiment, or is so widely diffused throughout the length and breadth of the land, as our own. Medical men, from every town, State and nation where civilization exists, might meet in assembly, with common interests, a common code of ethics and a common literature. Such an assembly would present all the varied interests of science, for it is a conceded fact and one of intense significance, that the useful arts, as well as natural science, owe much of their vigor and prosperity to the discursive researches of the disciples of Galen and Pythagoras. And it is still further conceded that more than one-half of the common stock of human learning is to be found garnered within the pale of our profession.

Now gentlemen, can we for a moment suppose, that an organization, embodying, as does this within itself, such an array of talent, such a concourse of brilliant and useful character, can be defeated or overthrown by any outside pressure or partisan opposition? We must and do answer, "never," so long as its present characteristic tendencies remain. But, let our profession link itself to any *special doc-*

trines, as represented by Eclecticisms, Spiritualism or Homeopathy or any other offshoot or abortion of some brilliant but diseased mind, the main-spring of our safety will be destroyed and the edifice overthrown. Our science, unlike all others which profess the healing art as their basis, is not made up of doctrines. It is a carefully arranged mass of facts and realities, collated with the strictest accuracy, and classified according to the laws which govern them, and he, who best interprets and best applies the principles, which result from such an embodiment, must be, the best physician. Doctrines, as such, have with us no place. We acquire our professional status, simply, by a knowledge of facts. We learn the peculiarities of the remedies, which experience has sanctioned, we discover the rule of safety, required in their administration and we acquire the skill requisite to discover the fallacy of trusting too much to medication alone. Here then we observe the distinction which separates us as a profession, from empiricisms. We are taught to seek our remedies wherever they may be found, of acknowledged eminence. Homeopathy, more than any other form of error has detracted from our numbers, but not at all from our character as a profession. The miserly money maker or the disappointed and illy repaid class, who have waded through doubts and years together, mistaking their own incompetency, for the faults of a system have furnished the only proselytes. There is an eccentric force in our profession, which like the rapid revolutions of a wheel, casts off the rubbish which clings to its circumference. There is a rapidity of progress, a fierce and grasping energy, a relentless competition that should warn the feeble minded or incompetent to stand back. None but the keen, quick, appreciative mind, can keep pace with medical progress, or dare to take place in the front rank, in the warfare against error and delusion. The constant accessions to medical literature, the varied accomplishments which, year by year, are becoming more and more necessary to the physician, bewilder and perplex the tardy and incompetent. Nothing gives a sadder sense of decay than this loss or suspension of power, to deal with unaccustomed things and to keep pace with the rapidity

of the present age. It is little else than suspended animation, for were the power actually to perish there would be but a limited prospect of immortality. We should then behold these occasional desertions from our ranks with pity rather than with contempt. It, in the general, is not so much an error of the heart, as it is a feeble imbecility, a nerveless, forceless incapacity to assert and maintain a position of equality among their fellows. But, gentlemen, do all, who have enlisted with us faithfully live up to the requirements of untiring energy and labor? Are our medical bretheren all men of the age, men of vigor, thought, and study? Have we yet to learn that all clergymen are not divines, all lawyers are not jurists, all M. D's. are not physicians? It is a rare compound of tact and study, a close knowledge, both of books and men, that constitutes the truly competent physician. We cannot, surely, claim such excellence for all our bretheren, and can say, in sad and mournful truth, that the public get all the medical talent they pay for. Our standard of excellence is not established by any general average of talent, but by the attainments of those more brilliant minds, who necessarily form the minority, and become the leaders in our profession. It cannot be expected that men of intellectual eminence, possessed of a consciousness that the labor of their brains command an actual cash value, will flock in very considerable numbers to a profession which does not pay its devotees as well as the mechanical arts and sciences. One is at a loss, now, whether to assign the fault to the public or to ourselves.

Useful talent is tolerably sure to bring a suitable reward, except in an overcrowded market. It has been assumed that the mart has been overstocked with available medical skill. Such a claim would meet an emphatic denial, as the profession of medicine performs so large an amount of gratuitous labor, as to exclude from its practice a good number of intelligent and useful men, who believe "that charity begins at home," and who are not disposed to accept of Irish blessings in exchange for learned opinions.

Although we may all feel some degree of hesitation in introducing so commonplace a subject as that of dollars and cents,

and however much we may admire the good, the true, and the beautiful, however loftily the soul may look down upon the filthy lucre, yet, the laborer is worthy of his hire, and there is no valid reason, why he should not receive the reward of his labors. All this generous sentiment so lavishly bestowed in recounting the duties of the physician to the poor, will bear in the light of justice but one interpretation. A humane profession thrown daily into contact with the sufferings of poverty, will find a thousand opportunities for unobtrusive charity, which the instinctive sympathies of a common humanity, will not only dictate, but employ. But it does not, cannot mean that *we*, of all the world, should neglect the law of self preservation. It cannot be intended that the sacred duty of charity, so imperative upon the rich, should be entirely foisted off to the care and protection of the poor and perhaps penniless physicians. The most enthusiastic scientist can be startled from the investigation of some complex disease, by the unceremonious entrance of a dunning creditor, and many a glorious spirit has found his eager ambition for distinction and usefulness chilled by the bitter waters of poverty. Could all the history of aching hearts be known, there would be much less admiration of that fatal sentimentalism which has made a charity of the medical profession, and thrust upon its often too willing shoulders the whole support of the sickness of the poor. This is no extravaugant statement. Its verity is testified, not only by the general view of the profession, but by the letter and application. All the concealed treasures of earth, air and sea await our choice and disposal. The multitudinous forms of vegetable life afford their healing balm. The dark caves of earth are explored, that the chemist may rob them of the subtle mineral torture it by fire and melt it by his pungent acids. From the deep grottoes of the sea, the fish is captured, whose oil shall restore health and beauty to the wasted form of the invalid, while from that waif of ocean, "the sea-weed," which for centuries had been esteemed the type of worthlessness, is procured the valuable Iodine.— Food, air and sunlight, yield their tribute and the universal element, "water" stills its rippling current to assist our art. And

over the ultimate principles of all these agents, presides the calm spirit of the physician, whose quiet prophecy of help and hope, aids in its own fulfillment. Contrast if you please, this grand and universal art, with the narrow spirit of sectional medicine. Bound down by an unmitigable creed, the Homœopath loses the precious moment when by the exhibition of one heroic drug, he might change trembling chances, due the feeble invalid and restore the color to his cheek again. The Hydropath, a slave to a prodigious overestimate of the curative power of water, neglects those simple remedies to whose worth, the ages of the past testify. The Eclectic, imprisoned within the narrow limits of the vegetable powers, allows the mineral kingdom that right arm of therapeutics, to lie in useless idleness. He forgets or totally ignores the wisdom of the sacred writer, who declares that "God created medicines" *out* of the earth and he that is wise will not abhor them.

With these prejudiced theorists, is slavery to creeds, with us is liberty, the widest liberty, to select from every realm whatever remedy the beneficent Creator has placed at our disposal.

To the weak or ignorant mind, a creed is an absolute necessity. It leans upon it for protection from its own imbecility, or in that form of intellect which loves the marvellous, and is given over to an excess of refinement it finds in the subtle nothingness of Hahnemann, the twin sister to its own spiritual tendencies. It has been said in some of our medical periodicals that seven-eighths of the followers of Swedenborg are also devotees of Hahnemann and we all have noticed a similar proclivity in the spiritualists of the present day. It is, at any rate, sufficiently evident to all, that medicine is not exempt from the influences which govern systems of belief. An important inference may be deduced from this view of the question (*i. e.*) that legitimate medicine is unsuited to the peculiarities of certain minds, and that in these instances, it will never obtain their confidence. A thorough education of the people might somewhat modify this result, yet education only directs and does not mould the mind. At the first opportunity, it will slip off the shackles of the schools, and return to its original tenden-

cies. Quackery, then, is immortal, changing its phases to suit the special fantasies of the day, it will ever adapt itself to ignorance, superstition, or super-refinement. As these three elements make up a large proportion of living humanity, it is equally evident, that they must cause considerable deduction from the honors and profits of the regular profession. When all churches shall have merged in one, when the imaginative Swedenborgian shall be satisfied with cool Presbyterian logic, when the gross and sensual mormon shall adopt the calm and undemonstrative religion of the Episcopalian, when all varieties of dissent shall give up that independence for which so many thousands have suffered imprisonment, exiles, and death, rather than submit their creeds and consciences to the keeping of some dominant power, then, and not till then, shall we have the countenance and confidence of the entire community. But this is not the only inference to be drawn from the foregoing conclusions. The great mass of the community are sober minded, and, to some good degree conservative. The very qualities of empiricism which attract erratic minds are sure to repel the thoughtful and considerate. Hence it is, that in the perpetual strife of the "so-called" regular profession has ever stood as the representative of medicine, recognized as such, alike by the tenor of the laws and by an overwhelming public sentiment. The public mind acknowledges that *true* eclecticism, which is the characteristic trait of legitimacy, and he who deserts his profession for the practice of quackery, invariably loses social caste and position by so doing. We never hear of reputations won by quackery, but we do sometimes hear of the amount of money made, and yet, if we discard from view the few great fortunes made by inventors of omnipotent *pills*, we shall see that even this is at most, often an *ignis fatuus*, which dazzles to betray its followers into the very guagmire of poverty. The strong argument of money is yet in our favor. Such desertions are extremely uncommon, and never occur among men of our existing poor laws. In the management of our great hospitals, our prisons, and in every department of the public charities, every man, from the tutored Governor of the State, to the most for-

lorn official, is compensated for his services with the single exception of the physician. He, alone, for some fancied advantage in reputation or experience is condemned unpaid, to a service, always revolting and frequently most dangerous. Even in our county, our poor houses and our widely spread suffering poor are shuffled and foisted off in such a shape that no physician, unless he be some really godlike man or his reverse some charlatanical chiffonier can be induced to insult himself or demean the association to which he belongs, by laboring for the miserable pittance it affords. The price at which our labors are recognized has become so disgracefully small, that it is almost to be hoped, that our brethren may "*en masse*" conclude to make so poverty stricken a client as Jefferson County has become, a present of their services for the future. Now, the tendency of this whole system is to discourage and dishearten the entrance of talent into our ranks, and by securing an inferior order of talent, to result disastrously upon the public. Charity has ever been the brightest of medical virtues, and the devotion of the physician to the sufferings of the poor has given him his strongest hold upon the affections and sympathies of the public. The individual pauper is a fellow man, and is suffering from social laws, for which he is not responsible. We cannot add to the sense of wrong, forever burning dimly in his heart, by withholding aid and sympathy from him in his greatest hour of pain and trial. But the *public pauper* is a word of the great body politic, and it is but just and right, that his guardians should protect and support him.

It is to be hoped that those officials, whose duty it is to transact the business of the County, will be led to see these matters in their true light, and hereafter award a suitable recompense for services bestowed upon those committed to their care.

There is no valid reason why the physicians fee should be less, when service is rendered and charged to the County, than when like service is furnished to private individuals. In either case the amount of labor is equal, while the surroundings may be vastly different and more unpleasant. In private practice kind feelings, and a generous humane disposition, will find abundant opportunities to exercise its

benevolent behests, in behalf of the widow, the orphan, the aged and the infirm. In whatever aspect suffering humanity may be developed it turns *instinctively* and intuitively to our profession for relief, and very rarely is this confidence misplaced. A high and noble ambition, only is worthy our aim, and the example of "Him," who healed the sick, cured the leper, and opened the eye of the blind, should be ever before us as an incentive to all that is truly great and good. *Boerhaave*, the father of German physic, quotes "that the poor are the best customers, because God will be their paymaster." The Holy Scriptures furnish us with a still more unquestionable authority, and in this light, rich indeed must be the reward in store, for thousands

of our brethren, whose lives have been steeped in poverty, and who have expended their labors and their lives in efforts to mitigate the pangs of disease, and retard the rapidity of its progress.

It is not alone in the crowded hospital or on the battle field, that we should look for instances of manly devotion to the interests of suffering humanity. We see in every day life, frequent testimonials to that sublime fortitude that has enabled the toil-worn physician still to plod forward, along the pathway of duty, despite the storms of nature and the chilling ingratitude of a thankless public. But I have already prolonged my remarks beyond their prescribed limit, and will submit them to your favorable consideration.

